CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM

ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT TO THE HONORABLE RALPH KLEIN

May 15, 1992

Hon. Ralph P. Klein
Minister
Alberta Environment
130 Legislature Building
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

Dear Hon. Ralph Klein:

We are pleased to submit our report on Alberta's participation in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Program. The report is the culmination of the deliberations of the 9-member Advisory Committee over the past six months. It identifies and clarifies the most important issues regarding Alberta's participation in the Program and provides advice on how to address these issues.

Members of the Advisory Committee informally consulted with many organizations to determine the issues regarding Alberta's full participation in the CHRS Program. We encountered very little opposition and, in fact, were pleasantly surprised with the broad-based support for recommending participation. A list of organizations officially supporting Alberta's participation in the CHRS Program is provided with the report. Several industry associations viewed participation in the Program as neutral to their activities given that ample opportunity would be provided for consultation when proposing nomination of specific rivers.

Members of the CHRS Advisory Committee unanimously recommend that the Province of Alberta become a full participant in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Program. We also recommend that:

- Alberta Environment be designated as the lead agency for the CHRS Program in Alberta.
- Nomination of rivers to the CHRS Program be initiated by groups at the local level and receive broad-based support before proposing nomination.
- The local authority will bring the nomination forward to Alberta Environment.

- The first river to be nominated should be one with minimum potential for conflict.

The report contains a proposed nomination and designation process.

Thank you for the opportunity to have participated in the Advisory Committee. We view Alberta's participation in the CHRS Program as an opportunity which could provide substantial benefits to Albertans.

Sincerely,

Margaret Lounds
Chair
CHRS Advisory Committee

/clc

Members of the Advisory Committee:

Stan Klassen

Glenda Hanna

Howard Siebert

Jim Webber

Brian Free

Cheryl Bradley

Susan Ryan

Brian MacDonald

CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Report to the Hon. Ralph Klein
Minister of the Environment

RECOMMENDATIONS

The members of the CHRS Advisory Committee unanimously recommend that:

1. The Province of Alberta become a full participant in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Program.

2. Alberta Environment be designated as the lead department for the CHRS Program in Alberta. Alberta Environment has the mandate to manage rivers and has the staff qualified to coordinate the preparation of river management plans. Alberta Environment will be expected to initiate an appropriate interdepartmental referral process.

3. The nomination of Alberta's rivers to the CHRS Program be "grass roots" driven, that is, it should be initiated by groups at the local level and receive broad-based support before proceeding with designation. The process should be consultative and work to build consensus and resolve conflicts.

4. The local authority will serve as the lead agency in putting forward a river for nomination.

5. The first river to be nominated should be one with a minimum potential for conflict to test the effectiveness of the proposed nomination and designation process.

BACKGROUND

The concept of a Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) was presented at the Federal/Provincial Parks Conference in 1978. The federal, provincial and territorial ministers passed a resolution that Parks Canada begin consultation with the provinces and territories to develop a joint concept for a Heritage Rivers System.

Alberta has sent an observer to the CHRS Board meetings since it was initiated in 1983. Currently, all provinces and territories with the exception of Alberta and British Columbia participate in the Program. On February 1, 1992, the Hon. John Cashore, Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks, announced that the Province of British Columbia had established a Review Committee to investigate the goals and objectives of river management in B.C. and how the CHRS Program meets those goals. He has made a commitment to present his recommendation regarding B.C.'s membership in the CHRS Program to his Cabinet colleagues by September 1992. As of March, twenty-one rivers have been nominated across Canada. Thirteen rivers have been officially designated. Within Alberta, the headwaters of both the Athabasca and North Saskatchewan rivers, within the National Parks, have been designated to the Program.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MANDATE AND OBJECTIVES

As a result of the growing interest in the CHRS Program by individuals as well as organizations (Appendix I), the government initiated a review of Alberta's position in 1988.

Two studies were undertaken as part of this review. The first study coordinated by Alberta Recreation and Parks, with input from Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, and Alberta Environment, resulted in the preparation of a discussion paper which was submitted to the Deputy Minister's Committee on Heritage Resources, Recreation and Tourism on February 3, 1989 (Appendix II).

The issue was also discussed by the Alberta Water Resources Commission (AWRC). The Commission requested that Alberta Environment and Alberta Recreation and Parks coordinate a potential implementation strategy for the CHRS Program in conjunction with several other government departments. The strategy was presented to the AWRC in May 1990 and the Commission submitted a recommendation to approve Alberta's participation in the program to the Hon. Ralph Klein and the Hon. Steve West on October 29, 1990.

This subsequently led to the establishment of the CHRS Advisory Committee by the Honourable Ralph Klein, Minister of the Environment, in July 1991. The Advisory Committee consisted of nine representatives from various special interest groups from throughout the province.

The objectives of the Advisory Committee were to:

1. Review the existing literature on the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Program prepared by the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board.

2. Review the existing documents prepared by Alberta Government Departments related to Alberta's memberships in the CHRS Program.

3. Obtain information from other provinces and the territories regarding their experiences with the CHRS Program.

4. Assess whether or not Alberta should become a participant in the CHRS Program.

5. Advise the Minister of the Environment on the most effective way the CHRS Program should be implemented and administered in Alberta.

OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE CHRS PROGRAM

The objectives of the CHRS Program are to give national and international recognition to rivers having natural, cultural and/or recreational heritage values of national significance. Designation of a river to the CHRS Program does not restrict activity on, or along the river. However, it requires that the river be managed to conserve the outstanding natural, cultural and recreational heritage resources for which it was nominated.

Responsibility for the management of a Canadian Heritage River rests entirely with the government in whose jurisdiction the river is located.

BASIC UNDERSTANDINGS

Below are some key understandings about the CHRS Program which have been discussed and accepted by the Advisory Committee.

- The process for nominating a river and preparing a management plan is defined by the province.

- The CHRS management planning process, developed by the province, will fit into the river basin planning model used by Alberta Environment.

- To be designated, rivers must meet the national CHRS criteria based on biophysical, historical and/or recreational values. Based on available information and experience in other jurisdictions, it is anticipated that only a few rivers in Alberta will qualify. Furthermore, it is not necessary to nominate an entire river. Specific reaches that meet the CHRS criteria can also be nominated.

- Potential designation as a CHRS river should not delay or stall current strategies and plans for river management, but it should be considered in the planning and decision-making process.

- CHRS nomination is not limited to wild and scenic rivers. Regulated rivers elsewhere in Canada, which are not considered wild, have been designated for their historical and recreational values. For example, the Grand River in Ontario, which has been a focus for agricultural and industrial development since early in the 19th century, has been nominated as a Canadian Heritage River because of its historical significance, even though several control structures are located on it. Similarly, the St. Croix River in New Brunswick has been designated by the CHRS Board even though there are two hydro-electric projects and one pulp mill along its course.

- Alberta rivers which are designated will remain entirely under the jurisdiction of the Province of Alberta. A decision can be made to delist a river at the discretion of the provincial government should a change occur in public values, environmental or economic conditions.

- The federal government provides financial support for the program. It assumes the full cost of staffing and operating a national CHRS Secretariat as well as publicizing the CHRS program nationally and internationally. Federal financial assistance is provided to the managing jurisdictions for the preparation of nomination background studies and management plans.

  Environment Canada has recently significantly increased its funding commitment to the program under the new "Green Plan". It is anticipated that Alberta's costs related to the program need not be large. Alberta will have to contribute to the preparation of studies and plans and will be responsible for coordinating the program in the province as well as developing and distributing information materials. Capital works for CHRS rivers generally consist of providing signage, access and egress points. No major capital works will be required by the program.

- No new provincial legislation or policy statements will be required. Existing legislation and policy meets the requirements of the CHRS Program.

RATIONALE FOR PARTICIPATION

Based on these understandings, the Advisory Committee views Alberta's membership in the CHRS Program as an opportunity to:

- Increase public awareness of the historical, biophysical and recreational values of major Alberta rivers.
- Create new opportunities for local, regional and provincial tourism development, and attract tourism dollars to areas outside of traditional tourist destination areas such as the Rocky Mountain Parks. Eco-tourism is an important initiative for national and international tourist destination areas.
- Increase local support and volunteer commitment to river management.
- Demonstrate a commitment to conserving the heritage values of rivers in our Province.
- Provide an incentive for initiating planning studies that will lead to long-term, sustainable management objectives and plans on significant rivers. These management plans would be needed even without CHRS. However, CHRS designation will increase emphasis and improve public awareness of how rivers are managed in the province.
- Encourage resolution of user conflicts on significant rivers.

CONCERNS AND RESOLUTIONS

The Advisory Committee has heard some concerns expressed about CHRS. The Committee believes that these concerns can be addressed through an effective information and education program as well as consultative planning processes.

Concern:

The CHRS program is a national program which relies on federal participation and funding. The fear is that this could increase federal control over provincial jurisdiction.

Response:

The CHRS program has been successful in every member jurisdiction. None of the participating provinces and territories have experienced any problems or pressure from the federal agencies involved.

Concern:

Some industrial and economic development groups feel CHRS designation will restrict development opportunities because it could add even more red tape to approval systems which are already stringent and time consuming to the point where windows of opportunity are lost.

Response:

The decision to designate a river must involve multi-stakeholder consultation, including agricultural, industrial and other economic interests. Development which does not jeopardize the values upon which the CHRS designation is based is permitted on designated rivers. As well, Alberta's existing environmental legislation and policies have the highest standards and meet all of the guidelines established by CHRS.

Concern:

There may be unrealistic public expectations about the number of rivers that could ultimately be designated, as well as the level of protection granted by designation. For example, some communities may be upset that their river does not meet national criteria while some organizations or individuals may expect that CHRS designation will preclude all development.

Response:

An effective education program about the objectives of the CHRS program and its criteria for determining rivers of national significance should address these unrealistic expectations.

Concern:

Some organizations may attempt to use the program as a means to thwart development proposals for specific rivers.

Response:

A comprehensive system study that clearly identifies which rivers meet CHRS standards will prevent groups from using an unfounded hope for CHRS designation as a means to delay development. Furthermore, the process for nomination is designed to prevent inappropriate use of the program.

Concern:

Consideration of CHRS designation may result in conflict between stakeholders[1].

[1] - Stakeholders are people who have an economic, recreational, cultural or natural heritage interest in the river/reach.

Response:

It is important that the consultation process work to identify issues and resolve conflicts prior to nomination. Involvement of stakeholders in the planning process and in constructive dialogue will help to alleviate potential conflict, e.g., Workshop format.

Concern:

CHRS designation of a particular reach may affect activities upstream and downstream and throughout the entire river basin.

Response:

Implications for upstream and downstream activities will be addressed in the management plan for the river basin.

ALBERTA'S INVOLVEMENT IN CHRS PROCESS

Listed below are the steps the Advisory Committee believes should be followed for Alberta to join the CHRS:

1. Minister(s) to take proposal forward to Cabinet for Alberta to become a participant in the CHRS Program.
2. Cabinet decides if Alberta is to join CHRS.
3. Designate the lead department to be responsible for the program (see page 1, recommendation 2).
4. Public announcement of Alberta's participation in CHRS and initiation of the public education program.
5. Designated Minister appoints Alberta representative to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board (CHRB).
6. Commit the necessary resources to participate in the program.
7. Assign staff within the designated department

Responsibilities

- Planning and coordination of CHRS Program in Alberta
- Consult with government and non-government agencies, etc.
- Prepare Terms of Reference for Consultants for the various studies required by the Program

PROPOSED CHRS IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Figure 1 illustrates the implementation process in a flow chart. Major decision points are illustrated by YES or NO choices. The choice not to proceed with CHRS designation could be made if a nominating authority decides that CHRS designation for the river in question is not in their best interest, or if the river does not meet provincial or CHRS qualifications.

Listed below are the steps the Advisory Committee believes should be followed to implement the CHRS Program in Alberta:

1. Conduct a Province-Wide System Study

> *System studies are comparative studies of rivers in a province or territory. Their purpose is to identify those rivers with the greatest potential for further study as possible Canadian Heritage Rivers, and are used by governments to establish priorities and long-term plans.*
>
> *CHRS Annual Report 1990/91*
> *Page 15*

The process suggested by the Committee is:

- Compile suggestions from the staff of appropriate government departments, as well as the general public, regarding which rivers/reaches should be considered in the technical review.

- Conduct a technical review of these rivers/reaches to determine which ones meet CHRS standards.

- List of potential rivers/reaches is submitted to Minister for review.

- Potential candidate river/reaches are identified and publicized:

  - the list includes all rivers/reaches that were studied;
  - reasons for inclusion or exclusion are publicized;
  - the nomination process is to be outlined at that time; and
  - the designated department will, on request, provide literature and staff to assist the potential initiating agencies to understand the CHRS Program, supplementing the material available from the CHRS Secretariat.

2. Local Authority Submits Resolution for Nomination to Designated Department

It is recommended that the nomination process be driven by the "grass roots" initiative of local individuals and groups. It is up to the local authority to decide if they want a river reach within their jurisdiction nominated as a Heritage River. The local authority will be expected to determine public support by holding an information meeting with stakeholders. Nominations would be carried forward to the designated department by an appropriate local authority. The department will ensure that all the documentation is in place.

Local authorities identified by the Committee are:

White Zone

- Municipal Districts
- Improvement Districts
- Counties
- Incorporated Municipalities
- Metis Settlements
- Reserve Band Council
- Special Areas Board

Green Zone

- Improvement District
- Municipal Districts
- Incorporated Municipalities
- Metis Settlements
- Reserve Band Council

In the Green Zone, the Northern Alberta Development Council may act as a nominating agency.

The suggested procedures for the initial nomination are as follows:

- Any river/reach identified in the system study can be brought forward to the designated department, by a local authority that has that river/reach within its jurisdiction.
- A river/reach must have the support of at least one local authority along its entire length before it can be nominated.
- Individuals or groups that want to have a river/reach nominated must channel their request through a local authority.
- Local authorities assess local support through multi-stakeholder involvement. Local authorities may approach the designated department for assistance.
- Local authorities submit a resolution for nomination to the designated department. Designated department recommends to the Minister whether the nominated river meets CHRS criteria, has required local support and meets provincial requirements.

3. Background Study is conducted by the designated department, in cooperation with other departments, agencies, and the local authority.

> *Background studies are used by participating governments for the collection of detailed information on a defined area along a river or river section. The information studied usually includes the river's natural and human heritage, its recreational opportunities and the feasibility of managing the river as a Canadian Heritage River. This information is then analyzed against CHRS selection and integrity guidelines.*
>
> *CHRS Annual Report 1990/91*
> *Page 15*

The suggested procedures for the Background Study are as follows:

- Staff from the designated department, and other affected departments and agencies will work in conjunction with the local authority.

- Where possible, volunteer organizations will be encouraged to supplement provincial staff in gathering field data.

- At this stage, it is essential to establish a preliminary evaluation of management issues. Stakeholder involvement is necessary.

- It must be determined what user conflicts are likely to occur in the river basin, and whether or not stakeholders believe that these issues can be resolved in the context of Heritage Rivers designation.

- The committee recommends a workshop format of consultation with stakeholders.

- If the results indicate that CHRS designation is feasible, the Minister will direct the staff to prepare the Background Study and Nomination documents.

4. Submit the Background Study and Nomination documents to the Alberta Water Resources Commission (AWRC)

   - The AWRC will distribute the Background Study and Nomination documents to the five member departments for review and comment:

     - Environment;
     - Agriculture;
     - Forestry, Lands and Wildlife;
     - Municipal Affairs; and
     - Economic Development and Trade

     Any other departments that have an impact on river management will be included in the distribution, for example:

     - Tourism, Parks and Recreation; and
     - Transportation and Utilities

5. Submit Background Study and Nomination documents to Cabinet for approval.

6. If accepted by Cabinet, submit Background Study and Nomination documents to the CHRS Board for approval. If accepted, the river/reach will receive official "nominated" status, and the nomination will be included in CHRS literature.

7. Management Plan is prepared.

If the nomination is accepted by Cabinet and the CHRS Board, the nominating and managing agencies of Alberta will prepare a management plan. In 1990, the Board adopted guidelines that set out the basic components of a management plan for CHRS purposes.

> *The specific contents of the management plan will be the prerogative of the managing agencies alone and will not be "approved" or "disapproved" by the Board.*
>
> *The management plan will establish the boundaries of the river management area which is to be included in the CHRS and will set out the policies and practices to be followed by the managing agencies to ensure its development, management and use, consistent with the objective of the System.*
>
> *The Canadian Heritage Rivers System*
> *Objectives, Principles*
> *and Procedures 1984*
> *Page 17*

- Once a nomination has been lodged with the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, there is usually a three-year deadline to submit the Management Plan. In cases where management issues are more complex, it has taken as many as eight to ten years to finalize a plan.

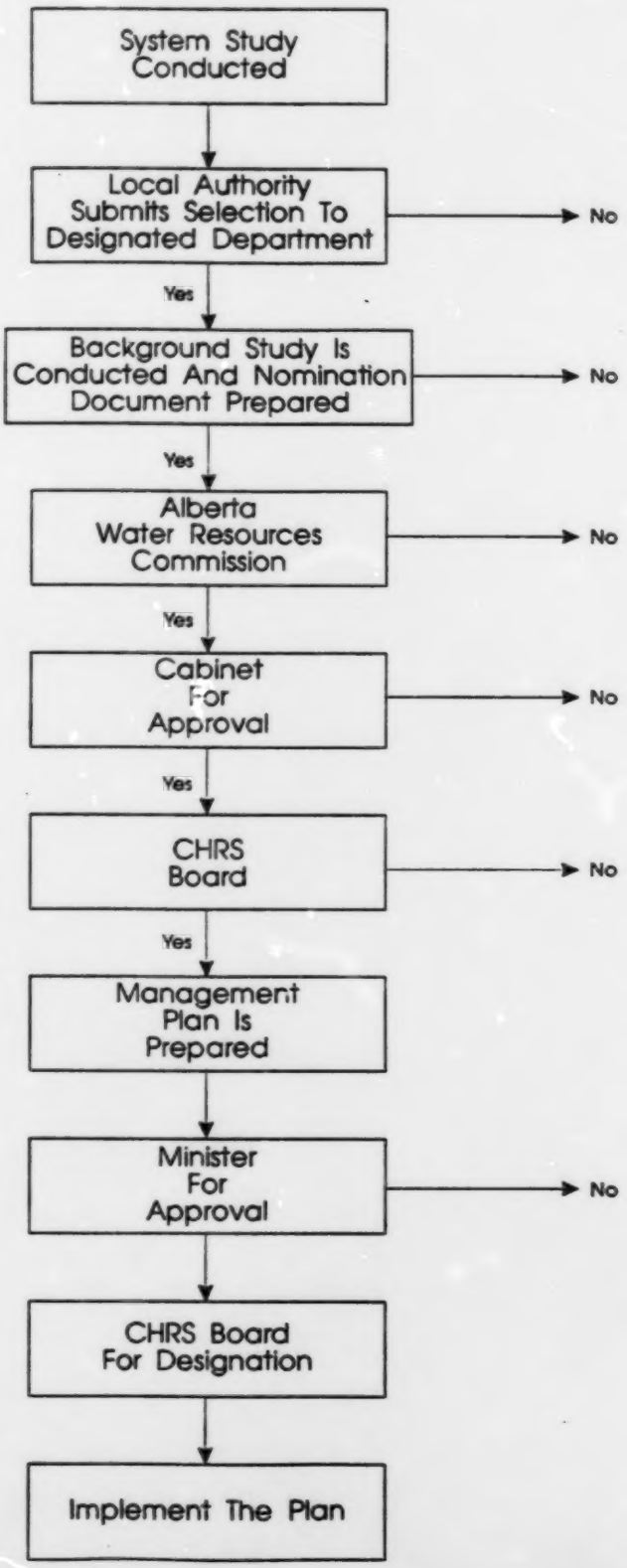
- Upon completion of the Management Plan and its endorsement by the local authority and Minister, the Minister will request the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board member for Alberta to file the plan with the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board.

9. Implement the Plan

Upon filing of the Management Plan with the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, the Minister will direct staff to implement the plan.

FIGURE 1

PROPOSED CHRS IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS



APPENDIX I

SOME ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING ALBERTA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CHRS PROGRAM

1. Lac La Biche Regional Economic Development Council
2. Canadian Federation of University Women - Edmonton Chapter
3. The Calgary Chamber of Commerce
4. The City of Calgary Heritage Advisory Board
5. The Environment Council of Alberta
6. Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (Edmonton Chapter)
7. Alberta Wilderness Association
8. Alberta Recreation and Parks Association
9. The Red Deer Regional Planning Commission
10. Trout Unlimited
11. The Alberta Irrigation Projects Association
12. The Urban Municipalities Association of Alberta
13. Bow Waters Canoe Club
14. Town of Fairview, Culture and Recreation Board
15. The Environmental Law Centre
16. The Bow River Water Quality Task Force
17. Precipice Theatre
18. The Society of Grasslands Naturalists
19. Friends of the Oldman River
20. Alberta Association, Canadian Institute of Planners
21. Federation of Alberta Naturalists
22. The City of Fort McMurray
23. Parks Foundation, Calgary-River Valleys Committee
24. North West Voyageurs Canoe and Kayak Club
25. Fort McMurray Mushers Association
26. Alberta Recreational Canoe Association
27. Peace Valley Conservation, Recreation and Tourism Society

APPENDIX II

Reports Prepared as Part of the Review Process Towards Alberta's Membership in the CHRS Program

1. Alberta Recreation and Parks - "Discussion Paper on Membership in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System." Prepared for the Deputy Minister's Committee on Heritage Resources, Recreation and Tourism, February 3, 1989, 21p.

2. Alberta Environment and Alberta Recreation and Parks "Implementation Strategy Proposal for Possible Alberta Membership in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Program." Prepared for the Alberta Water Resources Commission, August 31, 1990, 128p.